

detector is positioned between the feeder and the envelope opener so that the thickness detector detects the thickness of the leading piece of mail as the leading piece of mail is conveyed from the feeder to the envelope opener.

56. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 54 comprising a singulator for separating the extracted contents and serially conveying the contents along the document path.
57. (Previously Presented) A method for processing a leading piece of mail having contents comprising one or more documents and a trailing piece of mail having contents comprising one or more documents, comprising the steps of:  
feeding the leading piece of mail along an document path from an input bin;  
opening the leading and trailing pieces of mail along at least one edge at an envelope opening station;  
extracting the contents of the opened pieces of mail;  
measuring the thickness of the leading piece of mail;  
determining the gap necessary between the leading piece of mail and the trailing piece of mail based on the measured thickness of the leading piece of mail, wherein the gap is sufficient to avoid interference between the extracted contents as they are conveyed along the document path; and  
controlling the feeding of the trailing piece of mail along the document path to provide the determined gap.
58. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 57 wherein the step of measuring comprises measuring the thickness of the leading piece of mail as it is conveyed from the input bin to the envelope opening station.
59. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 57 comprising the steps of conveying the extracted contents along a document path to a sorter for sorting the extracted contents into one of a plurality of bins.

- 60. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 57 comprising the step of scanning the contents to determine the orientation of the extracted contents.
- 61. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 57 comprising the step of separating the extracted contents and serially conveying the contents along a document path.
- 62. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 57 wherein the steps of feeding the leading piece of mail and controlling the feeding of the trailing piece of mail comprise serially feeding the leading and trailing pieces of mail from a stack of mail in the input bin.
- 63. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 57 wherein the step of opening comprises cutting the pieces of mail open.

Claims 64-70 (Canceled)

- 71. (Newly Presented) The apparatus of claim 54 comprising an input bin for receiving a stack of pieces of mail, wherein the feeder is operable to serially feed pieces of mail from the stack of mail.
- 72. (Newly Presented) The apparatus of claim 56 wherein the separation station is operable to receive a packet of three documents and separate the documents from one another.
- 73. (Newly Presented) The apparatus of claim 54 wherein the system controller controls the feeder in response to the magnitude of the detected thickness of the leading piece of mail.
- 74. (Newly Presented) The apparatus of claim 54 wherein the system controller is operable to delay the feeding of the trailing piece of mail by a time period

determined based upon the magnitude of the detected thickness of the leading piece of mail.

75. (Newly Presented) The apparatus of claim 54 wherein the pieces of mail comprises envelopes containing three or more documents.
76. (Newly Presented) An apparatus for processing a leading piece of mail comprising an envelope containing contents of one or more documents and a trailing piece of mail comprising an envelope containing contents of one or more documents, comprising:
  - an envelope opener operable to open the envelopes along at least one edge;
  - a feeder for feeding the pieces of mail to the envelope opener;
  - a thickness detector for detecting the thickness of the leading piece of mail while the contents are within the envelope;
  - a controller operable to control the feeder to feed the trailing piece of mail in response to the detected thickness of the leading piece of mail to maintain the proper spacing between the leading piece of mail and the trailing piece of mail.
77. (Newly Presented) The apparatus of claim 76 wherein the thickness detector is positioned between the feeder and the envelope opener so that the thickness detector detects the thickness of the leading piece of mail as the leading piece of mail is conveyed from the feeder to the envelope opener.
78. (Newly Presented) The apparatus of claim 76 comprising a singulator for separating the extracted contents and serially conveying the contents along the document path.
79. (Newly Presented) The apparatus of claim 76 comprising an input bin for receiving a stack of pieces of mail, wherein the feeder is operable to serially feed pieces of mail from the stack of mail.

- 80. (Newly Presented) The apparatus of claim 76 wherein the separation station is operable to receive a packet of three documents and separate the documents from one another.
- 81. (Newly Presented) The apparatus of claim 76 wherein the system controller controls the feeder in response to the magnitude of the detected thickness of the leading piece of mail.
- 82. (Newly Presented) The apparatus of claim 76 wherein the system controller is operable to delay the feeding of the trailing piece of mail by a time period determined based upon the magnitude of the detected thickness of the leading piece of mail.
- 83. (Newly Presented) The apparatus of claim 76 wherein the pieces of mail comprises envelopes containing three or more documents.